

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRASIL 05073 01 OF 02 292047Z
ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 5073

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, BR
SUBJECT: MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH D. JULIO MESQUITA
NETO, DIRECTOR OF O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO

1. SUMMARY. IN VISIT WITH JULIO MESQUITA NETO ON JUNE 23 I FOUND MESQUITA VERY POSITIVE ON IMPROVEMENTS IN HUMAN RIGHTS IN BRAZIL AND HIS ASSESSMENT OF PRESIDENT'S VISIT, HOPEFUL ON RETURN TO DEMOCRACY AND IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS WITH UNITED STATES, CRITICAL OF CARDINAL ARNS FOR EXCESSIVE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, FEARFUL OF A FIGUEIREDO ADMINISTRATION WHICH HE TAKES AS GIVEN BECAUSE HE QUESTIONS COMPETENCE OF CANDIDATE, AND DERISIVE OF FRONT FOR REDEMOCRATIZATION WHICH HE REGARDS AS "BAG OF CATS." END SUMMARY.

2. MR. MESQUITA DID NOT CONSIDER RELATIONS BETWEEN HIS PAPER AND THE GOVERNMENT TO BE VERY GOOD. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE NO LONGER CENSORS ON THE PREMISES OF O ESTADO, THE "DIALOGUE" WAS MOSTLY ONE WAY. THE PAPER WAS ALLOWED TO PUBLISH VIRTUALLY ANYTHING EXCEPT DIRECT CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT OR THE MILITARY, BUT THERE WAS LITTLE FEEDBACK EXCEPT THAT THE PUBLISHERS OF O ESTADO KNEW THAT THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT LIKE THEM.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRASIL 05073 01 OF 02 292047Z

HE SAID THERE WERE ALSO INDIRECT AND VARIOUS KINDS OF ECONOMIC PRESSURE EMANATING FROM GOVERNMENT CIRCLES. O ESTADO, FOR EXAMPLE, DID NOT RECEIVE ANY ADVERTISING FROM GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISES SUCH AS PETROBRAS.

3. MOVING TO THE BRAZILIAN POLITICAL SITUATION, MR. MESQUITA SAID THAT THE COUNTRY WAS PASSING THROUGH A

VERY DELICATE AND DIFFICULT PERIOD BUT ONE THAT COULD TURN OUT ESSENTIALLY POSITIVE. HE SAID THAT THE LIBERALIZATION MOVEMENT WAS NOT GOING TO BE STOPPED AND THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE NOW FOR THE MILITARY TO RETREAT FROM THE POSITION ESTABLISHED BY THE GEISEL GOVERNMENT WHICH FAVORED AN EVENTUAL REDEMOCRATIZATION OF THE COUNTRY. HE WOULD NOT VENTURE ANY PREDICTION AS TO HOW SOON FULL DEMOCRATIZATION WOULD TAKE PLACE IN BRAZIL, BUT HE THOUGHT THAT IF THE PRESENT PERIOD COULD BE TRANSITTED WITH CALM AND WITH CONFIDENCE THE NATION AS A WHOLE WOULD BENEFIT.

4. ASKED WHAT HE THOUGHT OF GENERAL FIGUEIREDO HE SAID: "HE IS NOT VERY INTELLIGENT, AND HE IS BADLY ADVISED." HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT THIS BOTHERED HIM AND HIS COLLEAGUES BUT THAT HE WAS HOPEFUL THAT THE GENERAL WOULD FIND SOME GOOD MINISTERS WHO WOULD ADVISE HIM CORRECTLY AND MOVE THE COUNTRY FORWARD.

5. ON HUMAN RIGHTS, MR. MESQUITA SAID THAT U.S. POLICY HAD DONE A GREAT DEAL TO SET A TONE WHICH WAS POSITIVE AND CONCERNED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN BRAZIL. HE BELIEVES THAT THE COUNTRY HAS MOVED A GREAT DEAL FROM THE TIMES BEFORE THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION WHEN THERE WERE "TORTURES AND KIDNAPPINGS AND MURDERS". HE FELT THAT GEISEL HAD HONESTLY STRIVED TO END THIS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRASIL 05073 01 OF 02 292047Z

MENTALITY IN BRAZIL AND THAT HE HAD LARGELY SUCCEEDED. THERE WERE NO LONGER POLITICAL VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THOSE FEW VIOLATIONS THAT DID OCCUR WERE COMMITTED BY UNCONTROLLABLE POLICE OFFICERS ON COMMON CRIMINALS. HE SPOKE VERY POSITIVELY ABOUT THIS PARTICULAR ASPECT OF THE GEISEL REGIME.

6. MESQUITA WENT ON TO NOTE THAT IT WAS THE NEWSPAPERS (NOT ONLY HIS OWN, HE WAS QUICK TO SAY, BUT OTHERS TOO) THAT HAD LED THE BATTLE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BRAZIL FROM ITS EARLIEST DAYS. HE SAID THE BATTLE HAD BEEN PICKED UP ONLY RECENTLY BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. THE CHURCH IN SAO PAULO, LED BY DOM CARDINAL ARNS, HAD APPROPRIATED THE HUMAN RIGHTS STRUGGLE FOR ITSELF. HE SAID THAT CARDINAL ARNS IN THE EARLY DAYS HAD OFTEN COME TO HIM WITH LISTS OF PERSONS WHOSE HUMAN RIGHTS HAD BEEN VIOLATED BUT THAT THE CARDINAL STOPPED SEEING HIM ONCE THE SITUATION BEGAN TO IMPROVE. MESQUITA SAID THAT CARDINAL ARNS WAS INVOLVED IN POLITICS "MORE THAN HE SHOULD BE" AND THAT HE WAS PROMOTING HIMSELF AND THE CHURCH AS MUCH AS THE HUMAN RIGHTS CAUSE. HE CITED AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE WAY THE CARDINAL OPERATED

IN MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN WHICH MESQUITA SAID HE FELT CONSTRAINED TO DISAGREE WITH CARDINAL'S EVALUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN BRAZIL. MESQUITA ALSO EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT THAT ARNS HAD BEEN SIGNLED OUT FOR RIDE TO AIRPORT BUT BLAMED ARNS BY SAYING, "THE CARDINAL FOUND HIS WAY TO THE PRESIDENT'S LIMOUSINE AND RODE WITH HIM TO THE AIRPORT."

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PAGE 01 BRASIL 05073 02 OF 02 292042Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRASILIA 5073

7. THERE SEEMED TO BE RIVALRY BETWEEN MESQUITA AND CARDINAL ARNS ARISING OUT OF MESQUITA'S FEELING THAT ARNS WAS NOT THERE WHEN GOING WAS TOUGH BUT IS NO CLAIMING CENTER STAGE. MESQUITA WAS APPARENTLY TRYING TO GET SOMETHING OFF HIS CHEST AND WAS CLEARLY CRITICAL OF THE CARDINAL'S POLITICAL ACTIVITIES.

8. ASKED ABOUT THE FRENTE, MESQUITA SAID HE THOUGHT THEY WERE "A BAG OF CATS". HE CHARACTERIZED FRENTE AS A PHANTOM AND DID NOT EXPECT IT TO GET ANYWHERE. HE EXPECTED REFORMS TO BE APPROVED MUCH AS GEISEL HAD PROPOSED THEM AND FIGUEIREDO TO BE PRESIDENT ALTHOUGH HE WAS FEARFUL OF LATTER BECAUSE HE DOUBTED FIGUEIREDO'S CAPACITY TO GOVERN.

9. MRS. MESQUITA CONCLUDED WITH THE ASSESSMENT THAT THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO BRAZIL HAD BEEN VERY POSITIVE, THAT HE HAD BEEN WORRIED ABOUT THE DETERIORATION IN US-BRAZIL RELATIONS, PARTICULARLY JUST BEFORE THE VISIT WITH ALL THE STORIES CIRCULATING AT TIME. HE HAD BEEN RELIVED ON THE PRESIDENT'S ARRIVAL TO FIND

THAT HE WAS WELL INFORMED AND INTENT ON MARKING THE
VISIT POSITIVE.
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PAGE 02 BRASIL 05073 02 OF 02 292042Z

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